DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 033 285 AC 005 384

TITLE A Positicn Paper on the YMCA and the Urban Crisis with Six Recommendations.

INSTITUTION Naticnal Board of Young Men's Christian Associations, New York, N.Y. Urban Action Commissicn.

Pub Date [68]

Note 11p.

EDRS Price EDRS Price MF-$0.25 HC-$0.65

Descriptors *City Problems, *Community Cooperation, *Disadvantaged Groups, *Religicus Organizations, *Responsibility, Social Workers

Identifiers Young Mens Christian Associations

Abstract

In response to the report of the President's Advisory Commissicn on Civil Discrders, the Urban Action Commissicn of the National Council of the Young Men's Christian Associations recommended to its member units that they: (1) regard the urban crisis as their priority item fcr future programing; (2) assume responsibility for bringing persons together for "up close' confrontation invclving diverse urban groups; (3) launch urban training programs fcr staff and develop training prcgrams fcr Urban Outreach Workers; (4) restructure their decision-making bodies to be mcre representative of community groups; (5) join with others to give more and better coordinated attention to the problems of the poor; and (6) be prepared to share in the development of public opinion and policy by taking positicns on issues. (dm)

ED033285

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
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A POSITION PAPER ON THE YMCA AND THE URBAN CRISIS WITH SIX RECOMMENDATIONS

Urban Action Commission
National Board of YMCAs

The Test Of Our Times

"Domestically, America has begun a new revolution. . . Unless we realize the size and nature of our problem, any answers we make will be too little and too late -- and indeed quite irrelevant. . . I wish there were some eloquence I could use, some fact I could cite, some verbal Pearl Harbor I could deploy so that all Americans would rise and say: 'That is true. I personally must do something about it.'"

--James M. Gavin (Lt.Gen.,Ret.)
Chairman of the Board
and Chief Executive
Arthur D. Little, Inc.

"This is our basic conclusion: Our nation is moving toward two societies, one black, one white -- separate and unequal. . .

Here is the essence of the charge: What white Americans have never fully understood -- but what the Negro can never forget -- is that white society is deeply implicated in the ghetto. White institutions created it, white institutions maintain it, and white society condones it. . .

This deepening racial division is not inevitable. The movement apart can be reversed. Choice is still possible. Our principal task is to define that choice and to press for a national resolution.

To pursue our present course will involve the continuing polarization of the American community and, ultimately, the destruction of basic democratic values. The alternative is not blind repression or capitulation to lawlessness. It is the realization of common opportunities for all within a single society."

--National Advisory Commission
on Civil Disorders

This is a time of severe testing for our human institutions -- for our Young Men's Christian Association. The test is the capability of the successful organization to respond to the demand for different services and changed systems. It is the call for the YMCA to direct its attention on impoverished people and to include within its fellowship of concern those who have the least of everything. And above all it is a mandate for organizations and for people to apply their intelligence, their wills, and their courage, to bring about changes in the communities and the capitals of our nation. If we would halt the endless cycles of misery and frustration of millions upon millions of poor families and their children, we must attack the root problems and the systems that perpetuate these conditions. To do less would treat the wound and not the ailment -- would minister to today's slum youth, knowing that tomorrow's will be along in greater number, with increased agony.

To respond is to risk. It is the risk of changing the established and comfortable image; of adopting programs and methods uncharted and untested; of involving those who have not been involved; of changing century old patterns and procedures. But the greater risk is to do nothing.

Six Recommendations For Council Consideration: A Call to Action For All Local YMCAs

1. We recommend that the National Council and its member units look upon the Urban Crisis as its major concern for the year ahead and that this urgency be reflected by every Association's reconsideration of its program priorities, its internal policies, its financial allotments, and the composition of its decision making bodies.

2. We recommend that YMCAs assume responsibility for bringing persons together for "up close" confrontations, involving representatives of diverse elements within their cities.

3. We recommend that Urban Training programs be launched for staff members to understand and assess the problems of our cities and the relationships of urban to suburban life, and that Special Training programs be developed for Urban Outreach Workers.

4. We recommend that the YMCAs decision-making bodies be re-structured in composition to be more representative in age, race, sex, and community influence.

5. We recommend that the YMCA join with others in coalitions of effort to give more and better coordinated attention to the problems of the poor.

6. We recommend that the YMCA, in order to relate maximally to the human disruptions of our time, be prepared to share in the development of public opinion and policy by taking positions on the issues that have deep bearing on the lives of persons.

1. We recommend that the National Council join with the National Board in looking upon the Urban Crisis as its major concern for the period ahead and that it ask its members to assume personal responsibility for helping their associations give similar recognition to this concern.

. . . This urgency will be expressed by an association's reconsideration of its program priorities, its internal policies; its financial allotments, and the composition of its decision-making bodies. The Commission recognizes that in many YMCA locations across the land effective work is underway directed to vital areas of urban need. Many associations have made strong shifts in program emphasis and staff employment. New undertakings range from JOBS programs to work with persons in low-income housing units -- from Detached Worker Corps to New Careers Programs for the under-employed -- from massive tutoring projects to work with migrant laborers -- from community dialogues which bring Negroes and whites together in honest confrontation -- to inter-racial camping experiences. Now <u>every</u> YMCA must assess its responsibilities for the crucially needed efforts to meet the massive human needs which confront us. The YMCA in the suburb must deal with its problem of non-comprehension and non-involvement and non-understanding -- problems which have helped produce the crisis within our crowded cities. No one is immune from this re-assessment of needs and new tasks. This is a call to every board, every staff, every city, every budget, every program plan. And we must do this now.

II. <u>We recommend that YMCAs assume responsibility within their own structures and within their communities to help persons "get up close" to the problems of relationships by bringing together for frank discussion and mutual understanding, representatives of diverse elements within their cities. Included in such honest involvements and confrontations should be a mixture of young and old, white and non-white, inner-city and suburb, affluent and disadvantaged, official authority and resentful minorities.</u>

. . . The importance of this need was voiced by Mr. Roger Wilkins, Assistant Attorney General and Director of the Community Relations Service, U.S. Department of Justice, at the first meeting of the Urban Action Commission of which he is a member. He said that as he travels the nation visiting city after city, amking his own assessments of the mood of those cities, his greatest fear and frustration is that the majority of the people in our country have no real understanding of what is going on -- no real knowledge or feelings about problems we face -- and a seeming unwillingness to find out what is wrong and to apply their efforts to do something about it. He said, if the YMCA is serious about applying its organizational weight to the wheel, there is no more important task than to wake people up -- to educate them to the reality of their time. Because the YMCA has access to every segment of community life it is uniquely equipped to perform this crucial task. This may be the most important single need facing our nation.

III. We recommend that urban training programs be launched for staff members to develop their capabilities to understand and assess the problems of our cities and the relationships of the urban to the suburban community; to determine the capacities of their YMCAs to render significant service; to become aware of the resources available to give support to these services; and to organize for action. In addition we recommend that special training programs be developed for Urban Outreach Workers.

. . . As an example, in May of 1968, four YMCA Urban Training Seminars are being held in Newark, Atlanta, St. Louis and Los Angeles on "Are We Headed For A Divided Society -- Implications and Prospects of the U. S. Riot Commission Report." Also a National Training Program is being readied for Detached Urban Outreach Workers. This latter program will

be specialized training for workers who work on the streets and in slums, taking the YMCA out of its buildings and into the areas of need. The purpose of Outreach Work is two-fold. Its workers reach young people who could not otherwise be reached, establishing personal relationships with them and being available to their needs. It also helps a YMCA gain first-hand knowledge of the conditions and the systems that are being perpetuated in the slums. This linkage will not only lead to programs and services which are supportive to youth in the ghettos (Job Training, Education, Counseling) but will produce the data to help the concerned YMCA work with other groups toward necessary changes in the community structures that are keeping people down.

These two training experiences being planned are only the first of many which must be mounted for staff and laymen in order to correct the existing deficiencies: decision makers and staff members who have not been exposed -- intellectually or emotionally -- to the deepest human problems of our age.

IV. <u>We recommend that the decision making bodies of our organization be restructured in composition so that they will be more representative in age, race, sex, and community groups.</u>

. . . If we would now expand our efforts to serve larger segments of non-white urban constituencies and greater numbers of young persons in school and out of school, we must give sufficient voice and vote to these population elements. If our organization will make impact on the larger community to help correct social injustice, we must give an internal

demonstration to this intent or we will lack credibility. At the same time we must add larger numbers of women to boards and planning groups. We will not only enhance our fellowship by including persons of different races, ages and sexes in it in key policy-making and planning roles; we will also bring the vitally necessary components together in doing planning that is related to work with these segments together with these segments of our society. We feel these changes are needed in every unit of authority and planning within our organizational structure -- beginning with our National and Area Councils and Boards to the smallest local YMCA.

V. <u>We recommend that the YMCA at the National and local level join in coalitions of effort to give more and better coordinated attention to the problems of the poor and the neglected, and if none of these exist to take leadership to bring them about.</u>

. . . The time has come when private and public, business and labor, educational institution and church and youth serving organization, must merge their efforts and their resources if any impact will be made on the problems causing the crisis in the cities. Often in the past the YMCA has not done this. We must now develop a new style of work. We must not only relate to the combined planning and programming structures within communities, but become actively involved in their efforts, taking the necessary initiative required to develop and strengthen these groups.

One of the most encouraging developments nationally and in the cities has been the formation of Urban Coalitions, Businessmen's Alliances, and patterns of organization such as that of Model Cities. The national co-chairmen of the Urban Coalition, Andrew Heiskell and A. Philip Randolph in calling for a wide range of cooperative programs said "the needs are massive and urgent, the hour is late and the times are

perilous." The joining of YMCA efforts with others must come, even at the risk of losing some of our own identity. The important thing is that the life of a person will be changed -- not that an organization will be acclaimed.

VI. We recommend that each unit of the YMCA, in order to relate maximally to the severe human disruptions of our time, be prepared to share in the development of public opinion and public policy by taking positions on the issues that have deep bearing on the lives of persons.

. . . Your Commission feels that the instrument of the Open Platform as developed and maintained by the Young Men's Christian Association, has been a laudable educational method in helping persons develop their own views on the chief social problems and issues of our time. It also knows that the alleviation of today's massive disorders will call for more than individual education.

If our YMCA professes to be deeply troubled about such human deprivation as is brought about through lack of income, racial discrimination, unemployment, lack of medical care, unequal educational opportunity, and need of decent housing, it must align itself with those who are similarly concerned, and with commitment work vigorously for the changes that will deliver solutions to the problems. As has been indicated previously, to do less would minister to young people at the surface and not the roots of the difficulty. It would not halt the cycle of neglect. If taking a YMCA stance on public issues seems revolutionary for some, let us remember that we are in the midst of a revolution.

"The enormous potential of the YMCA is exciting," said our National Board Chairman, W. M. McFeely, recently. "We have, I believe, the greatest

opportunity in our lifetime. This ought to be the day of the YMCA. But there is a very sobering thought that this may be our last clear chance to play a really vital role in shaping the future of our society."

Let us then begin with the shaping.

Considerations For The Work Groups: Discussion of Four Major Issues

I. A Commission recommendation calls for local "urban crisis confrontations" to focus on the problems of relationships, involving young and old, white and non-white, inner city and suburb, affluent and disadvantaged, official and authority and resentful minority.

. . . What can be done to initiate these meetings in your YMCA Board and Committee groups?

In your community, involving persons outside the YMCA?

. . . Can we agree on the first steps that should be taken in our local associations to accomplish this goal when we return to our communities?

. . . Do we see this need as important for the suburban and rural YMCA as for the urban?

. . . What steps can the Urban Action Commission or the National Board take in order to expedite the implementation of this goal?

II. A Commission recommendation calls for the composition change of YMCA Boards and Committees so that they will be more representative in age, race, sex and community groups.

. . . What can be done to bring this about in National and Area/State Boards and Councils and in local YMCAs?

. . . Can we agree on the first steps that should be taken in our local associations to begin to accomplish this goal when we return to our communities?

. . . What steps can the Urban Action Commission or the National Board take in order to expedite the implementation of this goal?

III. A Commission recommendation calls for the YMCAs involvement with national and local coalitions of business, industry, labor, private agencies and government to support the common efforts to cope with urban problems.

. . . . What can be done to bring YMCA involvement about in cities where coalitions have been organized?

. . . What leadership can the YMCA take to form coalitions in cities where none exist?

. . . What services can YMCAs best render within a community's coalition of efforts?

. . . Can we agree on the first steps to accomplish these goals -- involvement or formation -- in our local associations when we return to our communities?

. . . What steps can the Urban Action Commission or the National Board take in order to expedite the implementation of this goal?

IV. A Commission recommendation calls for the YMCA to share in the development of public opinion and public policy by taking positions on issues that have deep bearing on the lives of persons.

. . . What actions and procedures should national and local units of the YMCA now take to accomplish this aim?

. . . What first steps may be taken in our local associations when we return to our communities?

. . . What steps can the Urban Action Commission or the National Board take in order to expedite the implementation of this goal?

Requested National Council Action:

That the National Council approves the six recommendations as presented by the Urban Action Commission of the National Board and urges their adoption and implementation by all national and local units of the Young Men's Christian Association.

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